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6. Out of the Fitting Room

*Rethinking Patristic Social Texts on
"The Common Good"*

Introduction: Garbing the Fathers

The Leuven Expert Seminar dialogue on "The Church Fathers and Catholic Social Thought" offered an extraordinary opportunity to explore what patristic sources might offer in the ongoing construction of modern Catholic social thought, and particularly how they might encourage religious dialogue for justice and goodness internationally. In this chapter, I apply this challenge to explore the use of patristic ideas as they relate specifically to the ethical rhetoric of "the common good."

Unlike the heterogeneity of Protestant social action rhetoric and the intentional mystery of Orthodox theologies, Catholic social teaching is very systematic. It may not be amiss, therefore, in light of the ecumenical potential of the topic, to introduce a creative metaphor with which to address patristic ideas of the "common good" with their concerns for the quality of the human image. Thus in this essay, I invite the reader to think through this process

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with me by envisioning as a somewhat playful analogy the image of the fitting room, that space in a shop where we try on a new suit or coat before deciding on its purchase.

In trying on ethical ideas that might have practical relevance today, the historian or theologian may be tempted to take ancient texts and cut and tuck them to make them fit our very differently shaped culture, dressing them up with current fashions into recognizably modern forms. Some will fit into street clothes; others clearly may not. There may be nothing wrong with either the fashion or the shape of the body that wears it—that is, neither our modern ideas nor our historical texts—but it should not surprise us if we face difficulties in trying to fit one to the other. There will always be some discrepancies between ancient and modern shapes of Christian ethics, discrepancies that challenge easy application and tempt us to pin down, trim off, and toss out what we don't think fits. Indeed, the Leuven project's first study—reviewing how official Catholic social teaching documents used ancient sources—revealed how this is commonly done—not that Catholic social teaching documents have intentionally warped the patristic fabric they use, but rather that they have occasionally assumed it must fit, uncritically taking just those bits that usefully applied to certain gaps.¹

This study and others emphasize that patristic contributions to present ethical dialogue have historical integrity only when their texts are used in a way that respects or at least respectfully recognizes the original context.² The patristic authors are not fabric that we may cut and stitch to fit, but rather are part of a vibrant living body, the body of Christian tradition itself. Further, they offer us not one monolithic model, but a community of diverse voices. In

1. Brian Matz, "Patristic Sources and Catholic Social Teaching, a Forgotten Dimension: A Textual, Historical, and Rhetorical Analysis of Patristic Source Citations in the Church's Social Documents" in *Annua Munita Lovaniensis* 59 (Leuven: Peters, 2008), cited in Brian Matz with Johan Leemans and Johan Verstraeten, "Position Paper: The Church Fathers and Catholic Social Thought with a Case Study of Private Property" (predistributed seminar paper, 2007), 5–9.

2. I have discussed this elsewhere; see, e.g., Susan R. Holman, "The Entitled Poor: Human Rights Language in the Cappadocians," *Pro Ecclesia* 9 (2000): 476–89; Holman, "Healing the World with Righteousness? The Language of Social Justice in Early Christian Homilies," in *Charity and Giving in Monotheistic Religions*, Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients, ed. Miriam Frenkel and Yacov Lev (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 89–110. On context, see also Holman, "God and the Poor in Early Christian Thought," in *God in Early Christian Thought: Essays in Memory of Lloyd G. Patterson*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 94, ed. Andrew B. McGowan, Brian E. Daley, S.J., and Timothy J. Gaden (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 297–321.

bringing them into modern dialogue, we need not force them to parrot cultural views on Christian ideals that perfectly march our own. This would be dishonest, since they may sometimes include views on issues such as slavery, human rights, gender roles, punitive norms, and other behaviors that we reject as unequal or unjust. How then can we envision what might be called a "conceptual bridge" to enable patristic and modern views on the common good to walk together respectfully, and emerge from the fitting room of our theological imagination suitably garbed to work together? Perhaps we might begin, I suggest, by intentionally recognizing them as revered but fallible human representatives of a wide diversity of Christian social ethics. As part of living Christian tradition, their texts shape where we are today, both our exegesis and application, regardless of where we place ourselves within that tradition, whether Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, or some alternative medley. If we let them escape unscathed from our fitting rooms, we are more able to meet them as a crowd of old friends, esteemed colleagues, and suspicious characters in garbs that range from gilded to gaudy to ragged. At such meeting points, we will find that, in terms of social thought, they still share certain goals with us: a keen concern to right injustice, and a passion for ethical use of the natural and material world to relieve poverty, destitution, hunger, disease, and the sorrows, griefs, and outrage that follow any violation of human dignity. Perhaps the leading question to shape our own actions is not so much "Does their view fit ours, and, if so, how?"—though certainly we must ask this at some point. But perhaps we might also ask the question that we ask so regularly of our own ecumenical present, that is, "How do we walk together?" How might we draw from their wisdom, respecting nuances of diversities in a manner that supports what we honestly believe to be true about goodness and justice? While I offer elsewhere an extensive systematic response to this question, the present essay draws on this metaphor and these questions to explore the relevance of patristic texts to one specific ethical concept, that of the common good.³

3. For the broader discussion, see now Susan R. Holman, *God Knows There's Need: Christian Responses to Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Holman, "On the ground: Realizing an altered *philopachia*," in *Philanthropy and Social Compassion in Eastern Orthodox Tradition*, ed. Matthew Pereira (New York: Theotokos Press, forthcoming).

Constructing "the Common Good"

Modern dialogue on common good in Catholic social teaching is based on Aquinas's interpretation of Aristotle's political justice. For Aquinas, justice was "the premier moral virtue" that "directs a person's actions toward the good of fellow human beings."⁴ Common good is thus inseparable from and dependent upon justice. Figures 6-1 and 6-2 offer diagrammatic models for this. Figure 6-1 shows David Hollenbach's diagrammatic model of the common good in Catholic social teaching and figure 6-2, discussed further below, is my own experimental substitution of Hollenbach's modern terminology with patristic terminology within the same relational dynamics. Figure 6-1 makes quite clear that the "common good" in Catholic social teaching is not just a general phrase about an ideal image but a specific construct about social relationships.⁵ In our theological fitting room, that is, the "common good" is a sort

4. David Hollenbach, S.J., "Commentary on *Gaudium et spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)*" in *Modern Catholic Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth R. Himes, Lisa Sowle Cahill, Charles E. Curran, David Hollenbach, S.J., and Thomas Shannon (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 279. In a footnote Hollenbach comments (290, n. 19) that "Thomas Aquinas called the form of justice that orients citizens to the service of the common good both 'general justice' and 'legal justice.' See *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 58, art. 6. Pius XI called it 'social justice' in *Divini iustitiae* no. 51, and the U.S. bishops called it 'contributive justice' in *Evangelium*." Eleanor Stump's study of Aquinas does not address his views on mercy, but it might be usefully compared with her broader contrast between "ethics of justice" and "ethics of care." In my view, Greek patristic texts do not support this philosophic tendency to place mercy in inherent tension with justice; see discussion, 5. For my understanding of modern Catholic social teaching and how it relates to this issue, in preparing this paper, I am most indebted to the following sources: John A. Coleman and William E. Ryan, eds., *Globalization and Catholic Social Thought: Present Crisis, Future Hope* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2005), esp. Johan Verstraeten's contribution, "Catholic Social Thinking as Living Tradition that Gives Meaning to Globalization as a Process of Humanization," 28-41; Joseph Grenillion, ed., *The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching since Pope John* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976); Kenneth R. Himes, ed., *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005); David Hollenbach, S.J., *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*, New Studies in Christian Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Mary M. Keys, *Aquinas, Aristotle and the Promise of the Common Good* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); André Lakes and Malcolm Schofield, eds., *Justice and Generosity: Studies in Hellenistic Social and Political Philosophy. Proceedings of the Sixth Symposium Hellenisticum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Patrick D. Miller and Dennis P. McCann, eds., *In Search of the Common Good. Theology for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2005); David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992); and Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), esp. ch. 10, "A Representative Moral Virtue: Justice," 309-38. I am grateful to Ian Deweese-Boyd for drawing my attention to Stump's reference to Basil of Caesarea, and to Maria McDowell, Paul Kolbert, and Robert J. Daly, S.J., for their discussion of the work of David Hollenbach.

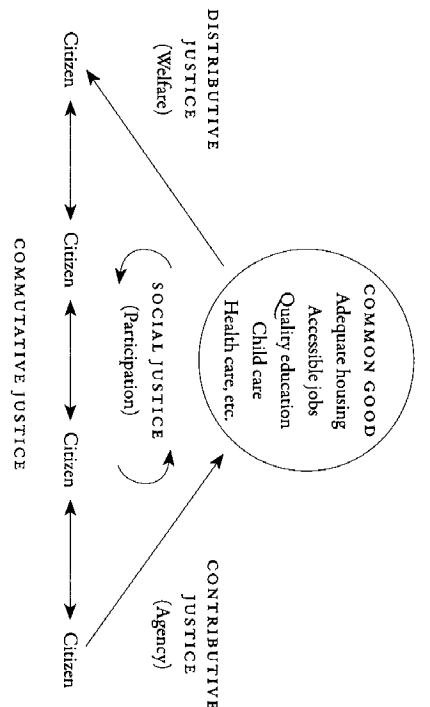


FIGURE 6-1. The Modern Model of the "Common Good" in Catholic Social Ethics
 Source: David Hollenbach, S.J., *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*, New Studies in Christian Ethics (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 196. Reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press.

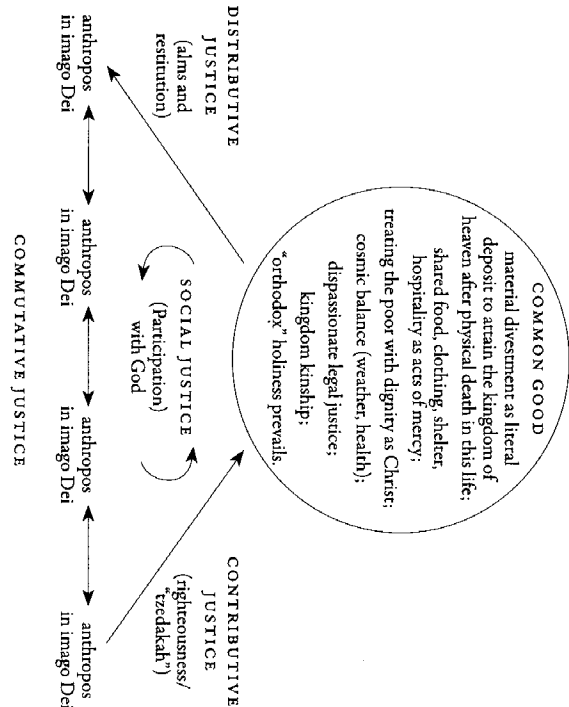


FIGURE 6-2. Patristic Concepts of the Common Good within Hollenbach's Framework
 Note: The terms in the "common good" box describe how this ideal was concretely defined and measured within society according to most patristic texts on social justice.

of formal moral suit one dons to delineate that conceptual system for measuring Christian social justice. As I will argue, patristic sources did share with us some aspects of this system, making "common good" a useful concept for comparative dialogue. And the better we understand their different terminology, the more effectively we can work together with our patristic mothers and fathers in applying the cloth to the oozing and bleeding social crises of our own world.

The authors of what we now call patristic texts lived, chronologically, at the historical midpoint between Aristotle and Aquinas. Since we know that Aristotle discusses the common good, and since we know that our authors were influenced—to varying degrees—by Greek philosophy, in crafting an interpreted interpretive method, we may approach the texts with three practical questions: First, how do the authors themselves describe "the common good"? Second, is there any hint that patristic views on these issues were influenced by Aristotle? And third, as we bring to the texts our own concepts of common good: which of these do our sources share, how do they discuss them, and what are the obvious differences? In other words, "Does their view fit ours and if so, how?"

Common Good in a Word: Patristic Use of κοινωφελής

First, how do the texts themselves speak of common good? Here we are helped by the fact that the patristic concept of "the common good" presents itself neatly in a single Greek word, κοινωφελής.⁶ κοινωφελής meant "common good" in the obvious sense of that which is good for all persons in a society. The word was used across the spectrum of ancient Greek texts to describe political, theological, and social ideals. Early Christian texts that use it include monastic *typica*, patriarchal registers, catena, a few legal novels, histories, and sermons. From late antiquity, we find it in *r Clement*, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, Libanius, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, and even a very late Greek translation of a sermon on penitence attributed to Ephrem. I will focus here only on Basil's use of this word as a place to launch the discussion. Basil's prominence in medieval discussion of common

6. I do not suggest that this is a "definitive" technical term, only that its existence illustrates that the generic concept—as a concept—was present in patristic thinking. Obviously the ideas inherent in this word could be expressed using other words and phrases (see discussion below).

good is suggested by the fact that he is the only patristic author whom Eleonore Stump quotes in her recent chapter on Aquinas's view of social justice. Other patristic scholars may wish to take this further in their own work on other patristic authors.

Basil used κοινωφελής only twice. In *Homily 6*, condemning stockpiling, he says, "riches grow useless left idle and unused in any place; but moved about, passing from one person to another, they serve the common good (κοινωφελές) and bear fruit."⁷ Here material possessions are imaged as a living substance that can grow in a healthy way only through a kinetic rotation process. This image is at the root of most patristic texts on redemptive almsgiving and is one Basil frequently contrasts with unnatural processes, like stagnation here in stockpiling grain, and in the destructive multiplication of usury, condemned in his second homily on Ps. 14/15. His use of κοινωφελής in *Homily 6* is especially relevant to modern Catholic social teaching because we know that Aquinas quoted from this sermon (though not this particular passage) in his own discussion of justice as it relates to ownership and redistribution to those in need.⁸

Basil's second use of the word is in *Ep. 265*, to three Egyptian bishops exiled in Palestine. There he writes, "We have learned of the orthodoxy of your faith and . . . your care for the brethren, and that not . . . carelessly do you furnish the means which are of common benefit (κοινωφελής) and indispensable to salvation."⁹ The context is the bishops' zeal at refuting Apollinarius and does not at all refer to material justice. Yet Basil's two examples echo precisely by the two uses that we find dominant in the other Christian authors: first, social harmony in terms of doctrinal "orthodoxy"; and, second, to note actions that repair material injustices. John Chrysostom most often assumes the second meaning, as we might expect. In his seventy-eighth homily on Matthew, Chrysostom praises the apostles, saying that since they "did all things for the common good, they attained to heaven. For nothing is so pleasing to

7. Basil, *Hom. 65*, trans. Toal, 3:329, slightly revised.

8. In *Summa Theol.* IIaIIae.32.5 ad 2, Aquinas quotes from Basil's *Hom. 67*, which Eleonore Stump translates as, "It is the hungry man's bread that you withhold, the naked man's cloak that you have stored away, the shoes of the barefoot that you have left to rot, the money of the needy that you have buried in the ground." Cited and briefly discussed in Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas*, 323, and 543, n. 88.

9. Basil, *Ep. 265*, trans. Deferrari, *Letters*, vol. 4, 106–7, dated 377, addressed to Eulogius, Alexander, and Harpocration.

God as to live for the common advantage. For this end God gave us speech, and hands, and feet, and strength of body, and mind, and understanding, that we might use all these things, both for our own salvation, and for our neighbor's advantage."¹⁰ Several late Byzantine sermons also repeat this explicit association of κοινωφελής. For example, the tenth-century collection of Symeon Metaphrastes quotes the passage from Basil's *Hom.* 6.5 verbatim. And the fifteenth-century *Tractatus de primo servitio Dei* of Gennadius Scholarius II, the first patriarch of Constantinople under Islamic rule, uses the word in an extensive appeal to help the needy based on the material models of Matthew 25. While late for our purposes, Gennadius's example offers clear evidence that κοινωφελής remained in the Eastern church a term closely connected with social justice to the poor.¹¹

*Common Good, Civic Identity, and the
Question of Aristotelian Influence*

Hollenbach's diagram reminds us that common good is, primarily, about the relationship of the individual to his or her civic or political community, whatever words are used. The context of κοινωφελής points us to an ethic of common good that builds on issues of community identity that are defined variously, as in Aristotle, with such terms as *polis*, *koinonia*, and related images. Thus we may next ask: Do we find any explicit evidence of Aristotelian influence in patristic texts on social issues? There is much debate over how Aristotelian ideas were mediated through the sources available.¹² Yet I suggest that

10. E.g., *In Mathaeum*, Hom. 7.8.3 (777^sA) (PG 58:714); trans. George Prevost, *NPNF*, 1, 107: 472; *In Joannem* 59, 101, l. 7 (= Hom 15:3 in John): "But how may we become imitators of Christ? By acting in everything for the common good and not merely seeking our own" (trans. G.T. Stupart, *NPNF* 5, 14:53); relating to upright living rather than explicit care for the poor in *De Babylae contra Julianum et gentiles*, sec. 47, l. 2; also alluding to it as imitating God in *De Iulianis sancti Pauli apostoli*, hom. 3, sec. 1, ln. 10; on preaching for the moral benefit of all, in *De Davide et Saul*, the 3rd homily on David and Saul, in *St. John Chrysostom, Old Testament Homilies, Vol. 1: Homilies on Hannah, David and Saul*, trans. Robert Charles Hill (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2003), 41–42 (a text repeated verbatim in Charles Hill, *Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press*, vol. 56, 544, l. 24); and as it relates to the heavenly *politeia* in the spurious Chrysostom homily, *Contra Iudaea*, vol. 56, 544, l. 24); and as it relates to the heavenly *politeia* in the spurious Chrysostom homily, *In sanctum pascha* (*sermo 6*), chapter 9, sec. 1, ln. 2.

11. *Sermones de moribus a Symeone Metaphrasta collecti*, PG 32:1168, l. 23; Gennadius Scholarius II's *Tractatus de primo servitio Dei*, chapter 9, is available through the TLG. In his day there was a revival of Greek and Latin learning in Constantinople. My source for the historical information about Gennadius is Warren Teagold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 800, 827, 830.

12. I.e., whether they reached them through whole treatises, catena, commentaries, popular oral wisdom, etc.

Basil offers us one particular sentence, on political ideals of civic and social harmony as it relates to the poor, that is suspiciously Aristotelian. Let us look at this sentence, its possible sources, and, most crucially, how Basil turns it to his own purposes.

In chapter 6 of his first homily on Psalm 14, Basil makes several biblical allusions and then says,

The Word orders us to share (κοινωνικός) and to love one another, in natural kinship (τῆ φύσει οἰκείων). After all, humankind is a civic and sociable (or gregarious) animal (πολιτικὸν γῆρας ζῷον καὶ συνεργηλαστικὸν ὁ ἀνθρώπος). Liberty for the purpose of restoration is a necessary part of the common life (κοινή πολιτεία) and helping one another upwards.¹³

I suggest that the sentence I translate, "Humankind is a civic and sociable animal," points to an Aristotelian source, although it is up for grabs how Basil learned his Aristotle.¹⁴ Let us consider how Basil's version differs from Aristotle and what mediating texts might stand between the two authors.

In Aristotle's *Politics* 1.1.9, we find, "Humankind is by nature a civic animal" or, in the Loeb translation, "Man is by nature a political animal."¹⁵ This sounds very similar, but Basil's sentence and Aristotle's are not literally identical. In particular, Basil's appeal to *politikon* and the *koinē politeia* include the rare word, συνεργηλαστικὸν, sociable or gregarious, literally a zoological tendency to move about in flocks. We can find several early Aristotelian fragments that use this word but never in relation to *anthropos* and *politikon*. The only extran text in which Basil's full spectrum of terms occurs in a single sentence (though not in the same word order)—and refers to Aristotle—is in Eustratius's eleventh or twelfth century *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*.¹⁶ This is highly suggestive, but it seems somewhat late to be absolutely conclusive.

Yet if we stop looking for a text explicitly identified with Aristotle, we

13. Basil, *Hom Ps. 14/15a*, PG 29,261CD, my translation. For a translation of all of chapter 6 and discussion of context, see Holman, *The Hungry Are Dying*, 112.

14. For some discussion of this debate, see e.g., Stephen M. Hildebrand, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea: A Synthesis of Greek Thought and Biblical Truth* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

15. ὁ ἀνθρώπος φύσει πολιτικὸν ζῷον. Aristotle, *Politics*, ICL 264, trans. H. Rackham, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1932), 1233a.

16. *In Aristotelis ethica Nicomachea vi commentaria*, 342, l. 27, where the sentence begins, ἡ οὐστος ἡ ἐνι ἐταί κατανικηθὲν ὁ ἀνθρώπος φύσει καὶ συνεργηλαστικόν, ἐθέλωνος ὁ φιλόσοφος τῆ τοσούτῃ φύσει τοῦ ἀνθρώπου φύσει.

quickly find three identical examples of a sentence that includes the word *συνεργάστρων* and can be translated, "For humankind is a naturally sociable animal, and made for citizenship."¹⁷ This first appears in a fragment of Posidonius.¹⁸ It is repeated, verbatim, by the fourth-century Christian, Nemesius of Emesa, which R. W. Sharples and P. J. van der Eijk translate, "For man was naturally born to flock together and be a creature living in a social community."¹⁹ This same statement is one of the many sentences that the Byzantine monk-physician, Meletius, copied verbatim from Nemesius several centuries later.²⁰ In each of these three identical texts, it is part of a larger, also identical, passage that defends the necessary interdependence and social benefits of civic life.²¹ Basil is alone in the way he orders the individual words, and unique in placing the sentence I have quoted—but not the rest of the identical text—within a context referring to Christian scripture. Basil alone cites this sentence immediately after mentioning natural kinship and just before his defense of materially restoration, common *politiká*, and the eschatological goal of social behavior and the common good that is, for him, the spiritual journey of "helping one another upwards."

17. *φύσει γὰρ συνεργάστρων καὶ πολιτικῶν θᾶτον γέγονεν ὁ ἀνθρώπος.*

18. Posidonius, *frag.* 309a, l. 138, in *Posidonius: Die Fragmente*, ed. W. Theiler (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982), 1:227.

19. Nemesius, *De natura hominis*, in *Nemesius Emesenus de Natura Hominis: Graece et Latine*, Christian Frideric Marhaei (Magleburg: Gebauer, 1802), 52, §19; for Eng. trans. see R. W. Sharples and P. J. van der Eijk, ed. and trans., *Nemesius: On the Nature of Man*, Translated Texts for Historians 49 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 44 and n. 225; Sharples and van der Eijk explicitly identify the occurrence of this line in Nemesius's with both Aristotle (*Politics* 1.1.1233a2-7) and Basil (*Homilies on the Psalms* 14.6, PG 29.261C). For another Eng. translation, see William Telfer, ed. and trans., Nemesius, *On the Nature of Man* 5 in *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, Library of Christian Classics, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 243. W.W. Jaeger (*Nemesius von Emesa* [Berlin, 1914], 126, n. 1 and 127) identifies Posidonius as the source of many of Nemesius's extensive citations, including this one.

20. J. A. Camer, ed., *Anecdota Graeca e codd. manuscriptoris Bibliothecarum Oxoniensium* (Oxford: Typographeo Academico, 1836), 3:119, l. 10.

21. The following is Sharples and van der Eijk's translation of the final two paragraphs in Nemesius's chapter 5, illustrating both the context of this sentence and a piece of the larger whole that is replicated identically in these three texts: "On account of the crafts and the sciences and the useful things that arise from these we have need of each other. Because we have need of each other we come together in numbers and share what is useful for life in our co-operative activities; this coming and living together they call a city. This was so that we should enjoy the benefit of each other from near and not from afar. For man was naturally born to flock together and to be a creature living in a social community: for no one man is self-sufficient in all things. So it is clear that cities were formed for co-operative activities and for learning" (trans. Sharples and van der Eijk, *Nemesius: On the Nature of Man*, 44).

Despite Basil's tinkering, the obvious similarities of these texts, and the linked use of the words, *φύσει*, *συνεργάστρων*, *πολιτικῶν*, *ζῴων*, and *ἀνθρώπων* seem clearly to argue for a common source, one that almost certainly goes back to Aristotle, but perhaps mediated through a later philosopher, like Posidonius. It is fairly clear that Basil is consciously quoting something and not composing this sentence *de novo*.²² Nor could I identify any other patristic use of *συνεργάστρων* in a similar discussion. Thus we seem here to have a clear example of Aristotelian influence in how patristic texts defined civic identity.

Common Good in Modern Terms? Patristic Justice,

Mercy, and the Appeal to "Common Nature"

These two examples—a word and a sentence—are relevant to us because they show us that concepts familiar to our own concerns were shared by the patristic imagination apart from preconceived notions that we might bring to these texts. Since they demonstrate shared concerns with ours, let us now bring our own agenda to the patristic sources and consider how certain broad ideals may or may not fit our own applications. In preparing for the seminar contributors were asked to consider a number of application questions, offered in the organizers' position paper's case study on property. Three of these are worth revisiting in this context. First: what is the end [= ultimate goal of [in this case, the common good] for patristic authors? Second: for whom does [the common good] exist? And third: how does one cultivate a right attitude towards it? Holding these questions in mind, I turn now to the issue of justice, and particularly how, in biblical and patristic texts, social justice is inseparable from individual action and mercy, again limiting the discussion to Cappadocian examples.²³ Bound into these concepts in the Cappadocian texts, we find as a consistent thread an appeal to *common nature*, with regularity perhaps qualified allusions to equality. These terms sound quite modern, or at least very useful for the modern reader, and merit careful attention.

We know from many texts that for Basil, as for Aquinas, "the common

22. For example, the only other Basilian use of *συνεργάστρων* that I can find is in a sermon among the *spiritia*, in which the word similarly modifies ζῴων but is otherwise used differently, there contrasted with ἰθαυτικῶν and ψευδιστῶν and nothing to do with philanthropic social justice to the needy. R. Basil's *Homilia in illud: Ne dederis omannem oculis tuis* (PG 31.1505, l. 47).

23. See, e.g., Moshe Wainfield, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1995), esp. 25–44.

good" is by nature relative to one's definition of justice, but this justice operated on the individual moral as well as the community level. For example, many of Basil's sermons on virtues pointedly define the healthy community in terms that cultivate individual ideals such as detachment, self-control, and ascetic self-reflection, and appeal to individual, personal gain in heaven as the leading motive for imitating God's natural beneficence and the common sharing seen among the animals. His sermons on fasting, for instance, explicitly relate communal ideals with personal piety. Not only does the wise abstinence of fasting build one's treasure in heaven, he says, but the one who practices the proper detached control of liturgical fasting incidentally "ensures dignity to the city, right ordering in the courts, household peace and salvation; (*De jejuniō* 1.11; PG 31.184B); "it is no less useful to the public, for it maintains good order among the population" (*De jejuniō* 2.5; PG 31.192B) and "greatly benefits the household, the marketplace, night and day, city and wilderness." (*De jejuniō* 2.7; PG 31.196A); ultimately resulting in the "crown of justice" (*De jejuniō* 2.1, PG 31.185B). The justice of the common good, for Basil, is ultimately rooted in God's goodness for, he says (in *Hom.* 20), "You have not known God by reason of your justice, but God has known you by reason of His goodness."²⁴ Common goodness is therefore based not only on ideals of harmonious community, but on all that goodness means for the individual within the very nature and person of God.

Gregory of Nyssa, calling for a just distribution of goods to the destitute sick, appeals to the legal image of equal inheritance between brothers. He identifies the homeless strangers as "kin" (*συγγενεῖων*) and "of your own race" (*οὐδόφῶν*),²⁵ and says, "Share with the poor who are the most-loved by God" because "all belongs to God, our common father, and we are brothers of the same race (*οὐδόφῶν*)."²⁶ His second sermon on the love of the poor emphasizes

24. Basil, *Hom.* 20, *On humility* (*Hum.*), in *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, trans. M. Monica Wagner (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1950), 480.

25. "You see a human being and in him you have no respect for [one who is] kin? No, you do not pity a being of your own race" (*Paup.* 2; PG 46.476, van Heck p. 115, ll. 8–10). *Ἐν τοιοῖσι τοῖσιν ἀδελφοῖσιν οὐκ ἀδῶν τῆν συγγενεῖων οὐκ ἐλάλει τὸν οὐδόφῶν.*

26. "But share with the poor who are the most-loved by God; all belongs to God, our common father, and we are all brothers of the same race. And it is best and more just that brothers reap an equal part of the heritage [but since things are ordered otherwise, and one or another monopolizes the greater part, at least let the others not be entirely frustrated]" (*Paup.* 1; PG 46.465, van Heck, 103, ll. 21–23). *ἀλλὰ μέρος ἕστω καὶ τῶν πτωχῶν τῶν ἀγαπητῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἅπαντα γὰρ τοῦ Θεοῦ, τοῦ κοινοῦ πατρὸς ἡμεῖς δὲ ἀδελφοί, ὅς*

that lepers are "human beings ashamed to answer this common name and fear dishonoring the common nature";²⁷ since "all humanity is governed by a single nature,"²⁸ Gregory says, "You belong to the common nature of all";²⁹ "let all therefore be accorded common use."³⁰

Nazianzen uses similar language, exhorting his audience to imitate the *lótrōs* of God, which translators render equality, evenhandedness, or "the justice of God."³¹ He also uses *ισονομία*, a Greek political term meaning "equality of rights." Appealing to Eden he says, "I would have you look back to our primary equality of rights, not the later diversity . . . As far as you can, . . . cover the shame of your race (*genos*), . . . offer relief to human need" (*Or.* 14.26).³² He also appeals to "same" or "equal" race (*syngenes³³* or *homophylōs³⁴*). And

*οὐδόφῶν: ἀδελφοὺς δὲ τὸ μὲν ἀπιστῶν καὶ δικαιοτέρων κατ' ἰσομοίωσιν μετὰ ἀγαθῶν τοῦ κλῆρου. All translations of Nyssen's *De pauperibus amandis* sermons are mine.*

27. "Human beings, I say, who are ashamed to answer to this common name, and who fear dishonoring the common nature by carrying the title" (*Paup.* 2; PG 46.480, van Heck, 118, ll. 6–9). *ἀνθρώπων οὐ καὶ οὐνομάξεν ἑαυτοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς κοινῆς προσομοίωσιν ἀγαθῶν τῶν ὁμοίων. καὶ ἐν τῇ κοινῇ τῆς κοινῆς τοῦ ὁμοίου τοῦ κλῆρου.*

28. "Sympathy (*συμπάθεια*) toward the unfortunate is, in this life, profitable for the healthy. For it is good (*καλὸς*) for the soul (*ψαυή*) to provide mercy to others who have fallen on misfortune, for all humanity is governed by a single nature" (*Paup.* 2; PG 46.488, van Heck 126, ll. 8–10). [. . .] *καλὸς γὰρ ἔστω τῷ σώτῃ τοῖν ἔργουσιν ἔργων ἐλέων ἐν ταῖς ἐπιπέων δυσπραγίαις προσκομειμένος. Ἐπιπέη γὰρ μὴ φέσει δικαιοτέρα πᾶν τὸ ἀνθρώπων.*

29. "Remember who you contemplate: a human person like yourself whose basic nature is no different from your own [in condemning the sickness of this body you may be condemning yourself and all nature]. For you yourself belong to the common nature of all. Let all therefore be accorded common use." (*Paup.* 2; PG 46.476, van Heck, 115, ll. 21–23, 26–28). Greek: *γνώθη τίς σὺν περὶ τῶν βουδέων ἕτι περὶ ἀνθρώπων ἀνθρώπων, οὐδὲν ἰδιόειον ἐν σαυτῷ παρὰ τῆν κοινὴν κερτημένον φύσιν . . . μετέχεις δὲ καὶ σὺ τῆς φύσεως παρὰ ἡμεῖς τοῖς πᾶσιν. Οὐδεὶον ἄς ἕτερον κοινὸν τοῦ προχρηστος ὁ λόγος ἔστω.*

30. *Οὐκοῦν ἄς ἕτερον κοινὸν τοῦ προχρηστος ὁ λόγος ἔστω.*

31. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 14, trans. M. F. Tol, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers* (Chicago: Regnery, 1963), 435.

32. Brian Daley, SJ, trans. *Gregory of Nazianzus, The Early Church Fathers* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 90.

33. "Twice: (1) *Or.* 14.5: καὶ τῆ περὶ τὸ συγγενεῖ εὐπράγχα τὴ καὶ συγγενεῖων (PG 35.864) trans. Daley; "compassion and sympathy for our own flesh and blood" (78); and (2) *Or.* 14.8: θεογενεῖσιν ἀδελφοῖ, τὸ συγγενεῖ καὶ ἀδελφῶν (PG 35.868), trans. Daley; "brothers and sisters, we must care for what is part of our nature and shares in our slavery" (79).

34. In 14.28 he writes, *Πίστη γὰρ φέλεται τοῖς ἀποφῶν καὶ ἀμαρτίας ἢ καὶ μέγα τῶν ἀλόγων ἀμαρτω μένη; (Or.* 14.28, PG 35.896, 1.35–36, transliterated from the TLG. Daley notes, "It's interesting that Gregory is using philanthropia here to make his point. This, of course, is the word that really dominates this oration, especially in the first five chapters or so, where he identifies it as the chief of virtues, reflection of God's creative love. But here, he's talking about kindness to animals with a term that basically means 'love of humans.' So the irony in what he's saying is increased: we show philanthropia (and should!) to animals that are not humans, when they are in trouble; how much more should we show it to

we see similar examples in Asterius of Amasea,³⁵ who in one sermon is outraged "that we who are created with equal honor (*ἰσοτιμίας*) live so unequally (*ἀνιστῶς*) with members of the same race (*μετὰ τῶν ὁμοφυθῶν*)."³⁶

We also find this theme in an anonymous fourth-century homily "On Mercy and Justice," (*περὶ ἐλέους καὶ κρίσεως*)³⁷ that is attributed variously to Basil and three other fourth-century bishops.³⁸ This sermon closely pairs so-

the anthropoi: that are homophyleis and of equal dignity with ourselves, precisely because they ARE anthropoi! [personal communication]. And in 14.14 Gregory writes, *οὐ τὸ κατ' εἰκόνα καὶ λαχόντες ἰσοτιμίας, καὶ φιλῶσσομεντες ἰσῶς* (10) *σὺν ἐπιτάξῃ, εἰ καὶ τὰ σώματα διεσφάθησαν* (PG 33.8.76, ll. 9–11, which Daley translates, "They have been made in the image of God in the same way you and I have, and perhaps preserve that image better than we, even if their bodies are corrupted" (83).

35. Asterius provides us with a virtually identical appeal to created equality, which he contrasts with the anomaly (*ἀνομάλια*) of injustice. "Consciousness is the mother of inequality, unmerciful, hateful mankind, most cruel. On account of it, the life of mankind is full of abnormality" (Πλασυνέτω ἡτρίτη τῆς ἀνωτέρου, ἀνηλεῆς, μακροβούτος, ὑπερτερῆ, δια ταύτην ὁ τῶν ἀνομήτων βίος ἀνωμαλίας γίνεται) (*Hom.*, 3, "Against Covetousness," ch. 12.1 in *Ancient Sermons for Modern Times by Asterius, Bishop of Amasia, circa 335–405 AD*, trans. Galusha Anderson and Edgar Johnson Goodspeed [New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1904], 100); for the critical edition see C. Darcena, *Asterius of Amasia: Homilies I–XIV; Text, Introduction and Notes* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 35, l. 1–2. In the same sermon, "Against Covetousness," Asterius writes, "Such is the marked disparity in the conditions of life, between men created equal in worth, and the cause of this disordered and anomalous state of things is nothing else than covetousness. . . . Would it not be much more just that the poor man should feast to the full on the other's luxury, and that the support of the needy should be the decoration of the rich man's table?" (Καὶ τὸ ὑπερτιμὸν ἕγω, ὁ ἀπόρουτος, τοσαύτην ἔχει τὴν διαφοράν τῆς δικαιοσύνης πρὸς τὸ ὑπόφθονον οὐκ ἄλλου πινός τῆς ἀδικίας ταύτην καὶ τὴν ἀνομήλιαν ἢ τῆς πλεονεξίας ἐταπεινωμένης. . . . Καὶ πόσῳ δικαιοσύνῃ τὸν πῶν μετ' ἐταπεινῶν ἀπορούμενον τῆς ἐλλείψεως τῆς τραπέζης δὲ τὴν τιμὴν τὸν ἀπόρου εἶναι τρυφήν) (*Hom.*, 3, "Against Covetousness," ch. 12.3, trans. Anderson and Goodspeed, 101; for the Greek see Darcena, 35, l. 11–14, 18–19).

36. He continues to argue that if "the nature of things were such that our life was truly represented by the inequality (*ἀνωμαλία* τοῦ βίου) of [the beggar Lazarus'] career with that of the rich man, I should have cried aloud with indignation: that we who are created equal, live on such unequal terms with men of the same race?" (*ἂν* οὐκ οὐκ ἐκτοθέτως ὑποτίμας οὐτως ἀνιστῶς μετὰ τῶν ἰσοφύλων ἀδελφῶν) (*Hom.*, 1, on the rich man and Lazarus, ch. 8.1, in Darcena, 12, ll. 6–7); trans. Anderson and Goodspeed, 34. In another of his homilies, Asterius calls for justice, saying "God loves a philanthropic disposition and poverty (*πτωχία*) when it is paired with justice (*δικαιοσύνη*): "God loves a kindly disposition and poverty when united to righteousness" (*ἀγαπᾷ δὲ γνῶσιν φιλάδελφον καὶ τὴν μετὰ δικαιοσύνης πτωχίαν*) (*Hom.*, 1, on the rich man and Lazarus, ET 19, Darcena, 7, l. 10–11).

37. *De misericordia et iudicio* (CPG 5929), PG 31.1705–1714, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, Eng. trans. Sister M. Monica Wagner (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1950), 507–12. Wagner offers no commentary on the text but see Paul Jonathan Fedwick, *Bibliotheca Basiliana Universalia: A Study of the Manuscripts, Translations and Editions of the Works of Basil of Caesarea* [= BBV], vol. 2, 1189–90. *Κρίσις* is a term that might be translated either "justice" or "judgement." This homily is, to my knowledge, the only Greek Christian sermon from antiquity with this title.

38. It survives in Greek and Coptic texts that are attributed variously to Basil, Athanasius, archbishop of Rakote, Epiphanius of Salamis, and Athanasius of Alexandria (Fedwick, BBV II.2, 1189–90). Such a generic attribution suggests that it expressed popular Christian views.

cial justice with giving alms from one's own labor. Here the anonymous author makes an extended argument that true social beneficence is possible only when one practices *both* justice and mercy.³⁹ He too appeals to *ἰσότης*, "equality," although in context referring to that equality (or "fairness") that he says ought to characterize the justice (*δικαιοσύνη*) one uses with slaves. The sermon describes justice with examples of trade, agricultural production, or manual labor, perhaps suggesting a village audience. It seems to speak of a situation in which people were providing so-called aid to the needy (*ἐπιεργασία πρὸς τὸν δεόμενον*) that was "financed by unjust (*ἀδίκια*) gains." As we find in the *Didascalia*⁴⁰ and other early Christian texts, this author also suggests that injustice taints not just the donor and recipient, but also the exchanged objects.⁴¹ "Exercise *φιλανθρωπία* to the one you have wronged," says the homilist, "and you will fulfill mercy with justice" (*ἐλεῶν μετὰ κρίσεως*).⁴² Among its appeal to community, we find a call for workers to become, through charity, both comrade (*κοινωνός*) and coworker (*συνεργός*) with Christ.⁴⁴

These texts appeal to common good within a broad nonmonastic community, reminding us that ascetic virtues and communal sharing were viewed as part of the broad civic image of Christian social justice.⁴⁵ Yet we also know that not all patristic authors agreed on such concepts as political equality. Sis-

39. The sermon seems to use *κρίσις* interchangeably with *δικαιοσύνη*, "righteousness." 40. Wagner 507; PG 31.1708, l. 19.

41. "[f] a widow] be nourished from [the proceeds] of inquiry, she cannot offer her ministry another intercession with purity before God" *Didascalia* 18.4.6, trans. R. Hugh Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 158.

42. Have mercy on the results of your labors" (*ἐκ πόνων ἐλέησον*) "and do not commit injustice on the pretext of offering your mercy to God out of unrighteousness," trans. Wagner 509; PG 31.1709, ll. 26–28.

43. Trans. Wagner 509; PG 31.1709, ll. 15–17.

44. Trans. Wagner 512; PG 31.1713, ll. 3–4, 9.

45. I have focused here on examples applied to the broad, "secular" society of late antiquity, not "common good" as we find it in monastic rules and typica only because such texts generally did not present themselves as obvious examples. One suggestive exception may be found in a spurious ascetic sermon attributed to Basil, *Sermo* 13 (PG 31.869–81), where the author writes, "If any [monk] be found for an reason to have an inordinate affection for a fellow religious, be he brother or kinsman or anyone else, he should be chastised as one who works detriment to the common good; for an excess of affection for one individual bears a strong implication of defect with regard to the others." (Basil of Caesarea, *Ascetic Admonitions* 4/13 [= CPG 2891] ET Wagner, 213.) However, Wagner's "common good" is a translation of compound concept, *τὸ κοινὸν ἀδικεῖν* (PG 31.880, l. 11), perhaps more literally "injustice to the community." Nonetheless, this text does support the general understanding of the common good as requiring equal justice to all members within the community, discussed in the third section of this essay.

ter Nonna Verna Harrison argues, for example, that Nyssen's views on social justice—seeing all of humanity as fundamentally equal—contrasts sharply with Chrysostom's view that true justice functions best within inherent and strict social hierarchies.⁴⁶ And though the anonymous homilist emphasizes that there is no conflict between social justice and mercy, one wonders if his very argument suggests an audience that held differing opinions.⁴⁷

These texts show us that both patristic and modern responses seek to address similar problems of socially destructive human pain and deprivation rooted in behaviors that fail to reflect the justice and mercy seen in biblical and christological ideals about the nature of God and creation. *Both* patristic and modern Catholic social teaching documents define the beneficiaries as belonging to the broader society, though how they belong may be defined differently (as discussed further below). *Both* patristic and modern Catholic social teaching documents argue that Christian ideals affect harmonious political order, a theme seen already in the apologists.⁴⁸ The early arguments that

46. Nonna Verna Harrison, "Greek Patristic Perspectives on the Origins of Social Injustice," in *Enil and Suffering in the Patristic Period*, Papers from the Third Annual Conference of the Stephen and Catherine Pappas Patristic Institute, October 12–14, 2006, Brookline, Mass. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, forthcoming).

47. Might he have had an imagined opponent, perhaps, who still held the once-Soic position that regarded mercy as fundamentally opposed to ideally "dispassionate" justice? On the tension between philosophical ideals of dispassion and the popular practice of beneficent actions in Hellenistic culture before and outside of Christianity, see now Anncliffe Parkin, "You do him no service: An Exploration of Pagan Almsgiving," in *Poverty in the Roman World*, ed. Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 60–82; and Parkins, "Poverty in the Early Roman Empire: Ancient and Modern Conceptions and Constructors," Ph.D. diss., Cambridge, 1997.

48. In their arguments that Christianity was universally good for the global political order, that is, a positive force in civic justice and social harmony, Melito of Sardis's *Petition to Antoninus*, for example, claimed that "our way of thought . . . became to your empire especially a portent of good . . . an unmitigated blessing . . . [since] from the reign of Augustus the Empire has suffered no damage" (Eusebius, *HE 4.2.6*, in *Eusebius: The History of the Church*, trans. G.A. Williamson [New York: Penguin Books, 1965], 188). Athenagoras's *Plea* argues that Christians are "of all men most religiously and rightly disposed toward God and your empire ('A Plea Regarding Christians by Athenagoras, the Athenian, a Philosopher and a Christian,' chapter 1 in *Early Christian Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics 1, ed. and trans. Cyril C. Richardson, [New York: Collier, 1970], 301). Justin's first *Apology* claims that "we are in fact of all men your best helpers and allies in securing good order" (Justin Martyr, *Apol.* 1.12, trans. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 247). And the *Epistle to Diognetus*, addressing an unknown pagan reader, appeals to common ideals shared with Christians about community support: both pagans and Christians, he argues, teach that one admirably imitates God whenever he "takes up the burden of his neighbor," "wants to use his own abundance to help someone in need," and "provides for the destitute from the possessions he has received from God"; in fact, such benefactors "become a god to those who receive them" (*Epistle to Diognetus* 10.6, in *The Apostolic Fathers, Volume 2*, LCL, trans. Bart D. Ehrman, [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003], 152–53).

Christianity was good for the (non-Christian) state remind us of the modern concern that Christian ideals of common good might deliberately seek to coexist with, and mutually benefit, cultures marked by alternative ideologies. And *both* cultivate a right attitude to the common good by appealing to the dynamics of material distribution, the nature of the human person, and particular practices such as treating persons with dignity, discernment, and living in dispassionate piety and simplicity, although again we find diversity. Both patristic and modern Christian ethics seek to promote interdependent and harmonious community and support eschatological ideals.

On Differences and Conclusions

But here we come to certain differences between early Christian texts and modern approaches, and that discussion brings us to the third and final part of this essay. A comparison of the terms in the top circles of Figures 6.1 and 6.2 demonstrates just a few of these differences. One of the most obvious differences is that of language. Early Christian texts, for example, define social goodness in terms that use such words as sacred, holy, image of god, patronage, mercy, charity, brother-and-kin, redemptive alms, and kingdom of heaven. Our modern approach, on the other hand, uses language that speaks of those issues we see in Hollenbach's top circle, in Figure 6.1: adequate housing, jobs, education, childcare, and healthcare. Such different word choices suggest different cultural images of how to measure the good of the human body as it affects the common good of society. As the vertical line across the bottom of Hollenbach's triangle shows, modern human rights language depends on democratic equality between individuals, and what he describes as value-for-value reciprocity in the social contract.⁴⁹ But patristic, and indeed Aristotelian, human rights imagery was formed within a society that assumed fundamental inequalities in social status. Christian authors used the concept of citizenship in pointing to the heavenly Jerusalem and the kingdom of God, and they often defined the relationship between persons in terms of their identity as *anthropoi* made in God's image, particularly when pointing to the destitute who suffer inhumane treatment. The currency by which one measures the valence of

49. I believe this particular phrase is my own but it is based on Hollenbach's discussion in *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*, 193.

ideals—what mercy and justice mean in a particular situation—varies across cultures. Alms, for example, were part of justice in patristic texts and ideal individual response to the common good were defined using terms of righteousness that share the broad meanings we find, for example, in Old Testament, Hebrew, and Syriac concepts of *tzedakah*, which meant both alms and righteousness.

We find other differences between the patristic authors themselves. For example, some are clear that one should give help and resources to the needy regardless of whether the recipient is Christian or not.⁵⁰ Others clearly limit distribution to members of the church community, or Orthodox believers.⁵¹ These are genuine differences. Many patristic texts call for cautious discernment between the worthy and the unworthy supplicant,⁵² while others call for a more indiscriminate generosity that leaves final judgement up to God alone.⁵³ Nor do authors seem necessarily to be consistent in their own position. Testing monasticism in Egypt as a young man, Basil argued in *Ep.* 42 that donors ought to give directly to the poor without seeking more “holy” (monastic) intermediaries to do it for them.⁵⁴ But later as a bishop he appears to change his tune and argues that the monastic bishop is the proper discerning intermediary (*Ep.* 150).⁵⁵ Some, like Anthony, practiced material divestment in a single act, after which they owned nothing. Others, like Melania and Pinian, seem to devote their entire monastic life to handling their personal wealth—as they keep giving it away. And Clement of Alexandria is the best known example of the advice to retain one’s property and simply practice moderate divestment. This variety of views should perhaps encourage us to welcome salutary diversity within our shared modern commitments to justice and mercy.

50. E.g., Cyprian of Carthage (*Works and Alms* 35, as depicted by Pontius the Deacon in the *Life and Passion of Cyprian*, ch. 10), John Chrysostom (e.g., *Hom. on Heb.* 10:8; PG 53,88), and many monastic desert sayings.

51. E.g., Leo of Rome and perhaps even Clement of Alexandria.

52. E.g., Basil.

53. E.g., John the Almsgiver and certain monastic stories from the desert tradition.

54. Basil, *Ep.* 42, “to Chilo his pupil,” possibly from the 350s, speaking as a young man, possibly in Palestine or Egypt, in ascetic training but with no role of church leadership. DeCretant says “as far as the style is concerned, it might well be Basil’s,” but notes that “some say it is the work of the holy Nilus [d. 430].” DeCretant, *Letters of St. Basil*, 1241.

55. Basil, *Ep.* 150 “To Amphilocheus, as if from Heracleidas,” in *Letters of St. Basil*, ed. and trans. DeFerrari, 2:369; the whole is at 361–71.

But there is one issue that remains a special challenge. This is the issue of eschatology as it relates to heaven, hell, and redemptive almsgiving. Catholic social teaching tends to emphasize improving society and working for justice in this present life. This is quite clear in the top circle of Hollenbach’s diagram, defining how common good is measured. Yet patristic constructions of the best community justice ultimately depend on redemptive almsgiving that is rooted in, and inseparable from an eschatologically eternal and other-world “kingdom of God.” In a culture where life was short and medicine, travel, and other securities unreliable, mortality had a poignant immediacy. In such a setting there is comfort and logic in focusing on the material stuff of this present life as having real meaning only in relation to eschaton restoration of justice, physical bodies, heavenly mansions, and redeemed social relationships.⁵⁶ In Eastern Orthodox tradition there is an emphasis on redemptive reality as a continuum already present in the here and now, while modern Western Christian tradition tends to emphasize more the difference that physical death makes in one’s experience of, and entry into, the eschaton. How one uses these patristic texts in modern discussion of civic or social identity may depend. I suggest, on how we and our audiences use and share—or differ from—these perspectives.

This issue especially challenges our application of these texts to Catholic social teaching respecting modern religious diversity on ideological issues. Both Jewish and Islamic ideas of almsgiving, for example, have similar vision of personal and global redemption mediated by divine engagement with human responses to physical stuff and the needs of the poor. But their rhetoric of philanthropy obviously does not see Jesus incarnate in street beggars, nor—as far as I know—a literal heavenly bank account or architectural mansion. And much of modern Western Europe denies any belief at all in the afterlife, or in omniscient divine justice and mercy. How relevant is patristic common good in this context, when its structure is built on an eschatological kingdom exchange that takes Matthew 25 rather literally? Can we use these arguments for beneficent divestment if we are engaging with an audience that does not share this exegesis? Indeed, if one cuts away patristic views on heaven and hell, one in fact even talking about the same “common good”?

I leave this to other theologians and ethicists to answer. Yet it seems to

56. This is particularly emphatic, for example, in Salvian’s *Ad Ecclesiam*.

me that patristic views on heavenly beneficence and justice cannot be entirely minimized in the attempt to apply them to modern ethics without collapsing the whole patristic argument for just social exchange. Ultimately for patristic authors, “the common good” has meaning only in the transfer of mutable, temporal reality to eternal social relationships—relationships with the divine and with one’s fellow humans, relationships that will endure into eschatological perpetuity. This may be why we can state with some confidence that patristic Christian views on justice and human rights strongly affirmed and bolstered the *spiritual* status of the poor and needy in society (that is, the existential value that God had for them and therefore how their fellow human persons ought to regard them conceptually in terms of Christian identity and absolute value)—and yet at the same time the same views often seem to have had less of an effect (if any) on systematically improving their *social* status in late antique society itself by, for example, improving education, housing, and economic balance.⁵⁷ While the reasons for change, lack of change, and modern criticisms of early Christian efforts at change remain complex, Basil’s appeal to “helping one another upwards” reminds us that the politics of interdependent social justice rests on the transitory nature of matter itself as even the poor and needy use earth to build heaven.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to offer for further discussion a discrete but provisional working definition of how patristic texts understood the common good. This is intentionally intended as a working definition to encourage further discussion. For patristic Greek texts that discuss social welfare issues, I suggest, the “common good” is the ideal of that which is best for all within the divinely-created order: It results from the divine absolute of eschatological justice. By it, all human persons benefit according to their place within the community network (or political civic order) and social relationships that reflect God’s created order for the world as patristic authors understand it. The

57. For the argument that patristic responses to poverty were realized more as rhetoric than as social reality in ancient society, see Pauline Allen, Bronwen Neil, and Wendy Mayer, *Preaching Poverty in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Realities*, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 28 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsgesellschaft, 2009); and Bronwen Neil, “Models of Gift Giving in the Preaching of Leo the Great,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 18.2 (2010): 225–59.

“common good” is a natural characterization of divinely ordered social harmony and interdependence. It is inseparable from mercy, philanthropic investment, and almsgiving, which are distinct activities subordinate to rightly ordered justice in present and future life. Common-good justice is actualized in the present life by—but not limited to—mercy with regard to such tangible substances or relational experiences as the acquisition, use, distribution or divestment of material property; and social and liturgical harmony. These manifestations best emerge rightly from the individual, voluntary expression of personal virtues, such as “orthodox” Christian beliefs and “proper” piety philosophical *sophrosune*; detachment, dispassion, and self-control as it relates to fleshly desires and material objects; and interdependence on God and others in the ordered community. For patristic authors, perfect attainment of the “common good” is founded on, presupposes, and ultimately realized in an eschatological reality that subordinates material survival in this world to the rightly ordered, relational substance of the next.

Despite the various challenges of these similarities and differences, it is clear that Greek patristic texts do offer a wealth of sources on the common good that overlap with our modern concerns sufficiently to be discussed respectfully and usefully in future research and practical religious ministry, humanitarian efforts, and international acts of social solidarity. The example outlined here are only the beginning. We should not lose sight, for example, of the sermons on charity, beneficence, and social issues that lie neglected among the *dubia* and *spuria*.⁵⁸ While date and authorship of such sources may raise complex problems, at least for Eastern Orthodox Christians these too are patristic texts. They too represent that body of living tradition and difference that walks together with us in this opportunity to offer new shape to the ongoing formation of social thought in Christian tradition.

58. There are, for example, at least a dozen sermons appear among the many *spuria* in Migne’s collection titled either *De elemosyne* (in Chrysostom’s *spuria*: PG 60:707–12; PG 60:747–52; PG 62:766–70); and his genuine sermon PG 52:261–72), *De jejuniis et elemosynis* (Chrysostom’s *spuria*, PG 48:1055–65), *De charitate* (Eusebius, Alexandria, 5th C., PG 86a:323–28); *De elemosyna, in divitiis et Lazaris* (the same Eusebius, PG 86a:423–52), as well as numerous sermons on fasting that may be worth examining to see if they (as is true of Basil’s on the same topic) are notably rich in language of social justice as it relates to the community (e.g., at least five under Chrysostom’s *spuria*: Mark the fifth-century hermit [PG 65:109–18]; and Eusebius [PG 86a:313–24]).

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